

## The Club of the Future.

MEN AND WOMEN'S CLUBS, THEIR POSSIBILITIES AND PROSPECTS.

BY JENNY JUNE.



LECTURER remarked recently that the world of to-day was of "very recent origin; that it had not, in fact, existed over two hundred years." A great deal of it has not, indeed, been in existence the half of that time, much less reached its present stage of development. The change in circumstances and conditions has modified, if not transformed, our social life; the separation of men and women is lessening as men become more human, less self-absorbed, and women more free, independent, and less prejudiced.

There was a time, and it is not so long ago, when social life meant only eating, drinking, and the display of fine clothes; the men coming together for the one purpose, the women for the other. When these inducements did not exist, there was nothing; for interchange of thought, intelligent conversation, would have been out of place, and the line of separation between the interests of men and the interests of women was felt to be as distinct as if drawn with pen and ink.

It is hard to say to what we owe the changes which affect communities, and alter without the knowledge of the individual his standard of ideas and opinions. Certainly it is not to any one motive or influence; but rather to the action of a mighty wave or current, drawn from many sources, gathering strength as it goes, and opening for itself new and broader channels and operating forces. Like a resistless torrent it sweeps away old landmarks, and puts a new face upon the landscape, which to the incoming generation will be as if it had always been.

The most important point in the nearer approach to social equality between the sexes, which modern life has developed, is the creation of active interests and companionship for the middle-aged woman. This will not seem so important to anyone as to the middle-aged woman herself, who needs them. But the influence is far-reaching. Heretofore women have had small share in the social life of men, but they have had no life at all apart from them. This obliged them to marry, or die to human sympathy and participation in common human joys. Men could make a life for themselves; but women could only gain any share in it through wifehood and motherhood, and when these failed of realization or comfort, there was nothing left for them but the sewing-society or mission-work. It was all another and more lingering form of the sacrificial suttee, or the nunnery.

The principal obstacle to the social union of the sexes has doubtless been largely built up by the narrowing prejudices of women themselves. Men could know everyone, but women could not; ergo, men and women could not form a united club except they all belonged to the same circle and were careful not to go out of it; and as men would never bind themselves in this way, the club was not formed.

In France, the first loosening of this environment was in the interest of politics; here the early genius of social and intellectual equality cropped out among literary workers and artists. The first gatherings of men and women upon a purely equal human and intellectual basis, in this city, were those which assembled at the residences of Miss Anne Lynch (Mrs. Botta) and the Misses Alice and Phœbe Cary, from thirty to forty years ago. There was no organization, nor did these gatherings result in any. Nevertheless they formed the basis, and gave much of the impulse to the social blending of the intellectual life of the sexes as it exists to-day. Margaret Fuller exercised much the same influence in

Rome, and at about the same time; while later, Mr. and Mrs. Moncure D. Conway made their house the center of a brilliant artistic and literary circle in London, which afterward developed into the Albemarle Club, with a house and all the government of a regular male club. This is in prosperous existence to-day, and has been supplemented by another, the New Somerville, which has a membership of upward of seven hundred. The Albemarle is, however, the only club of men and women in existence, so far as I am aware, that is based upon the same principles, and affords to its members the privileges and permanent advantage of club habitation.

In the consideration of the subject, the objection has always been made that the unity of the sexes in club life is at present impossible; that women would be unable to support the expenditure, and that it would give rise to so much newspaper gossip and scandal as to quickly drive away the most desirable portion of the membership. The objections are perfectly sound from the point of view of every-day experience in our great American cities; but it is at least probable that there are as many men as women who would welcome a new departure,—a club, for example, where the expense and temptation would be less, the social interchange of a higher order, while the membership and government should be of a kind to prohibit scandal, even in the newspapers.

The objection which weighs most in the minds of sensitive people, would, it might be supposed, hold also against boarding-houses and hotels occupied by men and women. Clubs are more open, are under more exact discipline, and really afford far less opportunity for intimate association than the ordinary hotels and boarding-houses which fill every avenue and block of our towns and cities. It is simply, therefore, that we have not been accustomed to think of clubs and club-life as belonging equally to men and women, and we attach the same ideas to such club-life, and bring some of the same reasons against it that were urged against co-education, and upon as little basis of fact.

In the meantime, the number of so-called Men and Women's Clubs—which are without local habitation, which meet in a room, sometimes one, sometimes another, or at the houses of members—has become legion. The Saturday Evening Club, the Travelers' Club, the Recreation Club, the Outing Club, and a hundred others might be mentioned. But the most important of the Men and Women's Clubs as yet organized, the most successful, and the one based upon the broadest, most elevated principles, is the Nineteenth Century Club of this city, the outgrowth and final flower, as it proved, of one man's singularly unselfish and truthful life.

The Nineteenth Century Club is now in its sixth year; its founder, Mr. Courtland Palmer, is dead; but the original and admirable character of the principles upon which it was founded, its continued success upon the same lines, and the fact that it has become the foundation of a system of clubs built upon the same plans and pursuing the same objects, entitles it to more extended consideration. Its first child was the Cosmopolitan, of Philadelphia, which at once took the same high rank in the sister city that the Nineteenth Century Club had taken in New York, its president being one of the most distinguished members of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, and its membership representing the best-known people, socially and intellectually, of the Quaker City, so famous for the brilliancy of its society characteristics.

The plan of the Nineteenth Century Club was to bring together men and women of the most opposite ideas, opinions, and habits of thought, but of high character and intellectual cultivation, for the discussion of literary, philosophic,



religious, and social ideas and problems. The inherited position and wealth of the founders, the etiquette exacted by the formation of a ladies' reception committee composed of well-known leaders in the social world, and the fact that the meetings for the first three years were held in Mr. Palmer's own house, gave it an exclusive atmosphere which made its original and brilliant discussions all the more attractive.

Scholarly men find few opportunities to make statements or present views excepting as teachers, and hardly one of any note in the United States—not too distant from the city of New York—but gladly accepted the chance afforded of addressing the appreciative and intelligent, if critical, audience assembled as the Nineteenth Century Club. James Russell Lowell, Julian Hawthorne, Dr. Newman, George W. Cable, Rev. Heber Newton, Judge Noah Davis, Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, Prof. David Swing, President Eliot, of Harvard, Dr. McCosh, of Princeton, President Barnard, of Columbia, Prof. Amringe, Mr. Metcalf, the editor of the "Forum," Mr. Moncure D. Conway, Miss Anna Brackett, the foremost woman teacher in the United States, Surgeon-General Hammond, Prof. Felix Adler, Rabbi Gottheil, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, and others of equal eminence, have been among the speakers and lecturers. History and romance, Eastern legend and modern poetry, problems of life, and the practical work of the schools were among the subjects which held the closest attention, from the lips of, and addressed to, such men and women as those I have mentioned.

The question of the club-house, and the resolvability of such a purely intellectual and social center as the Nineteenth Century Club into a regular Men and Women's Club, with club-house, and club economic privileges, was brought before the membership at a business meeting, by Mrs. Sherwood, and finally decided in the negative. The risks and responsibilities, it was felt, would be too great, especially in so expensive a city as New York. The club numbers now three hundred or more members. The annual dues are twenty-five dollars from each member. The season does not begin till late November, and ends in April, about eight meetings taking place in the course of the year, for which each member receives four tickets. This makes each set representative of family or friends, and increases the size of the audience, so that it usually consists of seven or eight hundred persons,—ladies and gentlemen,—and tests the capacity of the spacious assembly-room of the Metropolitan Opera House, which has been the place of meeting for the past two years. New members are only now admitted as vacancies occur.

The Radical Club, of Boston, anticipated in a measure the Nineteenth Century Club of New York, in the free discussion of ideas and in the equal membership of men and women. But it lacked the opposing and contrasting elements, the "all-aroundness," of the Nineteenth Century Club, and also the organization, which alone can furnish a basis for growth. The gathering known as the Radical Club came together under the auspices of Mrs. John Sargent, wife of Rev. John Sargent, a Unitarian minister, and always met at their spacious, hospitable home on Chestnut Street. Emerson, Whittier, Lowell, Dr. Bartol, Mrs. Cheney, Miss Alcott, and all the Boston luminaries, with many from other cities, were regular or occasional visitors, and the club was important enough to be reported for New York papers by Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton, in her correspondence. The death of some of the old and best-known frequenters, and the removal of Mrs. Sargent to New York, broke up what had been an active and enlightened center of philosophic thought and ideal theory, rather than practical work or investigation of current need.

How far these various experiments to formulate and blend

the social and intellectual life of men and women can be considered representative of the true club-life of the future, it is impossible to say. It is only so recently that women have been considered capable of intellectual life, that equal participation in its thought and activities is not to be expected as an instant achievement. Women's colleges and high schools of learning have only existed within the last half-century, and it is only within the last twenty-five years that there has been any bond of union, any common ground upon which educated women could meet. Now, we not only have clubs, but Alumnae associations, and great associative bodies of women for social, philanthropic, educational, and administrative work; all of which is preparing the woman of the future for a place beside the man, which must change and modify his life, in blending it more completely with her own.

The club has heretofore been more of an economic than a social consideration with men. It has given them an exclusive and luxurious environment which they could not obtain, even at greater cost, elsewhere, and conferred the prestige and distinction of an organization upon the home of the individual. It has at the same time built up a wall of separation between the sexes, encouraged and fostered isolation, and supplied all the means for indulging any natural desire for a useless, selfish, and luxurious life. Since the institution of Women's Clubs, there has been an effort by the more intelligent, active, and progressive among club men, to enlarge their borders, to measurably open their doors, to cultivate a field which should produce something of interest and use to others. They have revived the art element in club life, they hold exhibitions, and give occasional receptions to which women are invited. Is not this a step toward the neighborhood club, which may some time form the happy solution of an expensive social problem? A neighborhood club, with building containing reading-room, lecture or assembly room, upper stories for living or lodging-rooms, a restaurant under club control, and a government composed equally of men and women, is a perfectly possible scheme, which only needs the collection of adaptable and appreciative individuals for its realization. Here, the gifts of one become the property of all. Here, painting, music, literature, each finds a home and lends a charm. Here, those who are distinguished for personal worth or high attainment should find recognition, and an atmosphere free from petty jealousies and attempts to decry the work and reputation of others.

The club life of the future, in short, to fulfill its function, should provide a social life which to a certain extent should be the common property of all who fulfill the conditions of participation. There is no loneliness equal to the loneliness of a great city to those shut out or shut in, by want of resources to provide and reciprocate individual hospitality in the modern luxurious way. Such people may be every way charming, intelligent, refined, educated, but they shut themselves up, and become morbid, because the opportunity does not exist for the exercise of different gifts for the good of all. This centralization in the interest of greater happiness and expansion, should be the work of the Club of the Future.

My name is April, sir, and I  
Often laugh, as often cry;  
And I cannot tell what makes me!  
Only, as the fit o'ertakes me,  
I must dimple, smile, and frown,  
Laughing, though the tears roll down.  
But 'tis nature, sir, not art;  
And I'm happy at my heart.

MRS. Z. B. GUSTAFSON.